10-10-2007

Sen. Judd Gregg Celebrates Nation's First Commercial Offshore Mussel Farm

Dolores Leonard
UNH Media Relations

Sen. Judd Gregg Celebrates Nation's First Commercial Offshore Mussel Farm

Contact: Beth Potier
603-862-1566
UNH Media Relations

Dolores Leonard
603-862-3685
Atlantic Marine Aquaculture Center

October 10, 2007

DURHAM, N.H. – U.S. Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) joined University of New Hampshire faculty and students in Portsmouth today to celebrate the nation's first commercial offshore mussel farm. The farm, operated by New Hampshire fishermen Andy Lang and Robert Bryant, uses technology and know-how developed by scientists at the university's Atlantic Marine Aquaculture Center. The farm's blue mussels — "Isles of Shoals Supremes" — have just hit local markets and restaurants.

"Open-ocean farming of mussels is an environmentally sustainable practice and an economically viable option for New Hampshire fishermen, and best of all they taste great," said Gregg as he sampled the new product at a dockside event at Portsmouth's Fish Pier. "Supporting our commercial fishing industry requires innovative strategies, the kind that come from combining federal and state support with the research talent at University of New Hampshire and the entrepreneurial spirit of Northeast fishermen."

In addition to Senator Gregg, speakers included Lang, owner of A.E. Lang Fisheries; Richard Langan, director, UNH Atlantic Marine Aquaculture Center; and Taylor Eighmy, UNH interim vice president for research. Guests toured the Meriel B. (the UNH aquaculture research vessel) and the Eastern Star, (the fishing vessel that has been outfitted to tend the new farm), sampled fresh Isles of Shoals Supremes mussels, and learned more about university's offshore fish and shellfish research.

Funding for the research that led to the mussel farm was secured by Senator Gregg and is administered by the UNH Atlantic Marine Aquaculture Center, formerly known as the Open Ocean Aquaculture Project. The grant is provided through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The center's goal is to conduct research and technology development necessary to stimulate a sustainable offshore aquaculture industry in New England and nationwide. The center developed the technology to farm and harvest blue mussels in a submerged, open-ocean environment, and worked with commercial fisherman Andy Lang to establish a mussel farm in2005. Lang is now working with Robert Bryant to manage the farm.

Lang's farm is located off the coast of Hampton, out of sight and safely beneath boat traffic. From the surface, only two pairs of buoys, bobbing about 600 feet apart, are visible. The farm

is rigged with longlines, each spanning 600 feet and anchored to the seafloor at each end by a two-ton granite block. Two clusters of submersible floats raise the line to form the corners of a backbone from which loops of mussel grow-out ropes are suspended.

"We need alternatives in the face of changing fishing restrictions and the fact that our fisheries are not an infinite resource," said Lang. "Mussels are a clean fishery, and this is straightforward technology. The scientific support from UNH has been wonderful, the quality of the product is superior — I think we can raise the finest mussels in the world in right here in New Hampshire."

At its current size of 12 longlines, this farm can produce up to 180,000 pounds of mussels annually. Because the mussels are raised in a less turbulent environment than those farmed near shore, they have thinner shells and larger meats, making for a superior-tasting mussel. In addition, because mussels feed on naturally occurring microscopic plants free of additives, they are environmentally sound and sustainable.

"Andy and Bob's success in taking our technology out of the laboratory and into the marketplace is enormously satisfying to see," said AMAC director Richard Langan. "We look forward to realizing similar success with our open-ocean finfish aquaculture work."